



## Media Release – August 2019

*For immediate release*

### **National Breastfeeding Helpline granted \$8.29m in funding**

The Australian Breastfeeding Association's (ABA) National Breastfeeding Helpline has received an \$8.29m investment from the Federal Government, forming part of their commitment to implement *The National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2019 and Beyond*. The funding agreement spans four years, effective 1 July 2019.

Australian and international public health bodies recommend that all babies be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and continue to be breastfed at least into their second year of life. Although 96% of mothers initiate breastfeeding in Australia, by four months only 27% are still exclusively breastfeeding and rates continue to decline from there. The National Breastfeeding Helpline operates 24/7 and has been supporting Australian families since its inception in 2008. Over the past 10 years the Breastfeeding Helpline has received in excess of 840,000 calls.

Increased costs in IT infrastructure, running a national Registered Training Organisation (RTO), supporting a volunteer workforce and organisational system and compliance costs have had a major impact on running the Breastfeeding Helpline. The Minister for Health Greg Hunt has recognised that ABA requires additional funding to continue this vital service that supports thousands of mothers every year.

Alison Boughey, ABA's Chief Executive Officer, explains that the Government's new funding proposal will make a significant difference to the National Breastfeeding Helpline by ensuring it can not only continue, but evolve to reach a wider demographic of parents.

"We are delighted that the Federal Government has recognised that to be able to effectively run the National Breastfeeding Helpline and provide the level of support that mothers need, an increase in funding is paramount," Ms Boughey said. "Almost 700 of our volunteers are fully trained with a Certificate IV in Breastfeeding Education and qualified to provide telephone support to mothers. The upkeep is tremendous and the new funding agreement enables this, along with the opportunity for growth and expansion."

A recent study conducted by the ABA, LaTrobe University and several Melbourne hospitals has demonstrated that with the telephone support of an accredited volunteer, mothers were more likely to breastfeed their babies for longer.

"The study is a perfect example of just how important the service is to Australian mothers," Ms Boughey continues. "If the service was to no longer exist, it would leave major gaps and additional costs for the health system – including increased visits to GPs and hospitals. A recent survey of mothers who have recently called the Helpline indicated that without this service, 47% would have visited their GP or medical provider."

The National Breastfeeding Strategy has been endorsed by all States and Territories through the COAG Health Council. It provides an enduring policy framework for all Governments to provide a supportive and enabling environment for breastfeeding.

The National Breastfeeding Helpline forms an integral part of the Strategy. "The Strategy, which has had major input by ABA's Breastfeeding Information and Research team, recognises that breastfeeding is important for the health and wellbeing of both mother and baby," Ms Boughey said. "We are excited to be a part of this and in supporting the Strategy to reach its goal of doubling

breastfeeding rates at six months of age by 2025. This is in line with the World Health Organisation's target and we are confident that the revised funding will help us achieve this."

The ABA and Ms Boughey would like to formally recognise the funding support from the Federal Government.

"We are extremely thankful to The Hon. Greg Hunt and the Federal Government for recognising the importance of ABA's work and the role of the National Breastfeeding Helpline in supporting Australian families to breastfeed," Ms Boughey said. "I would also like to acknowledge the incredible work of ABA's volunteers, who work day and night to ensure mothers are equipped with the right information and support when they need it the most."

For a copy of *The National Breastfeeding Strategy: 2019 and Beyond* visit the COAG Health Council website [www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports](http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports)

For more information on the Australian Breastfeeding Association please visit [www.breastfeeding.asn.au](http://www.breastfeeding.asn.au). The National Breastfeeding Helpline is available 24/7 on 1800 686 268 and is a free service.

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